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Digital Media and Cultural institutions in Russia: online magazines as aggregates of cultural services

Focusing on online magazines, this article aims to shed light on Russian cultural institutions from the perspective of digital media. My analysis concentrates on urban lifestyle magazines, a sub-category of consumer magazines and media genre, which emerged in Russia in the glossy magazine format and is now experiencing a powerful 'second rising' on the internet as several new titles have grown out of simple websites or paper-format periodicals into online magazines of a clearly defined urban magazine concept. My article asks how the adaptation to the digital communication environment by lifestyle publications re-defines the very concept of a magazine and reorganises the institutional ties between media- and cultural industries. This focus enables me to analyse lifestyle magazines as a dynamic field of interaction in which cultural meanings are produced and negotiated. Based on new media studies, I see the cultural transcoding (Manovich 2002) of the networked and automatized information transmission into the magazines' content as being a significant factor in the development of contemporary culture and media. Ultimately, my article introduces an attempt to analyse new media titles combining qualitative media analysis with the developing theory of 'algorithmic culture' (Striphas 2015). My argumentation is based on two case publications: *Afisha*, established in 1999 as a weekly glossy magazine introducing all cultural events in Moscow, and *Inde*, a digital-born regional lifestyle magazine focusing on urban culture in the Republic of Tatarstan. Urban lifestyle magazines are important for the institutional organisation of Russian culture, as they direct their

readers' attention to a broad selection of arts, products and events; strengthen the link between consumers and cultural entrepreneurs; and build on a long tradition of print journalism, thereby transmitting the values of reading and literacy to a popular public. Moreover, my analysis shows that, through their multi-platform publication strategy, online magazines (re)organise as aggregates of digital resources helping to manage cultural decision making in a consumerist setting.

Keywords**:** lifestyle magazines; digital media; city culture; cultural consumption; algorithmic culture

10 106 words

Introduction

In Russia in the 1990s, glossy consumer magazines became an important visual element of the post-Soviet cultural space, sending the messages of liberal economic values and relaxed reading culture. At newsstands, bookstalls and kiosks all over Russian cities, magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Playboy* were on display next to the Soviet newspapers *Pravda* ('Truth') and *Izvestiia* ('News'). In the 1990s and early 2000s, glossy consumer magazines were also one of the most economically profitable branches of the Russian media industry, introducing the work-mechanisms of international corporate publishing houses to post-Soviet media markets (Dubin and Zorkaia 2010, p. 23–25, Vartanova and Smirnov 2010). Glossy magazines raised a new generation of journalists who learned to produce content for specialised niche audiences and to respond to the changing trends of the consumer market as well as to the needs of both international format owners and local audiences. Simultaneously, glossy magazines offered new job opportunities for a number of creative professionals, such as literary critics and writers,

impoverished by the withdrawal of state support from the traditional cultural institutions (Wachtel 2006, Marsh 2007). In the period following the boom of the 1990s and early 2000s, the living conditions of consumer magazines have become more restricted by the increasing regulation of media ownership (especially concerning international titles) and advertisers' growing interest in internet marketing. Following global trends, several newspapers and magazines in Russia have transitioned from print editions to electronic ones, and new launches mainly build on digital publication strategies (Zvereva 2014).

Focusing on contemporary Russian lifestyle magazines online, my article aims to shed light on cultural institutions from the perspective of digital communication and the set of cultural practices that have followed the 'virtualization' of publishers' work and 'computerization' of Russian society.[1] My analysis concentrates particularly on urban lifestyle magazines, a sub-category of consumer magazines and media genre which arrived in Russia in the glossy magazine format but which is now experiencing a powerful 'second rising' on the internet. The development of regional and local lifestyle online media is one of the strongest tendencies of Russian media today. Several new outlets have grown out of simple websites or paper-format periodicals into online magazines of a clearly defined city-magazine concept. The group of these new media includes such publications as *Bumaga* ('Paper') in St. Petersburg, *Downtown* in Voronezh, *It's My City* in Yekaterinburg, *Bol'shaia Derevnia* ('Big village') in Samara, *Seledka* ('Herring') in Nizhnii Novgorod, *Mors* ('Cranberry juice') in Kursk, Tomskii obzor ('Tomsk review') in Tomsk and *Inde* ('Well') in Kazan.

[1] On virtualization of the creative professional field in Russia, see Bikbov 2016; on computerization of Russian society, see Gorham, Lunde and Paulsen 2014, Nikiporets-Takigava and Panin 2016.

Urban magazines can be regarded as a cultural institution in at least three different capacities. Firstly, they are cultural arbiters, directing their readers' attention to a broad selection of contemporary arts and cultural products and events on a regular basis. Secondly, they play an important role in the economy of culture, strengthening the link between urban consumers and cultural entrepreneurs and offering information on different consumer choices (including cultural consumption). Finally, urban lifestyle magazines build on a long tradition of print journalism, thereby transmitting the values of reading and literacy to a popular public. My analysis operates at the intersection of all these roles, reflecting on the interaction and interdependence between media industries and cultural institutions in contemporary Russia. My research is situated in the broader context of the ongoing reorganisation of creative industries and urban development (analysed in detail by Gurova, Kuleva and Trubina in this issue), of which the rapid expansion of the online lifestyle magazine field is yet another indication.

As new media artifacts, online lifestyle magazines follow the internet's network architecture, that is, the decentralized multi-platform structure that 'operates through flow, traffic, and links' (Roberge and Melançon 2015, p. 3). Digital publishing thus brings lifestyle magazines into the realm of *algorithmic culture*, determined by 'the use of computational processes to sort, classify and hierarchize people, places, objects, and ideas, and also the habits of thought, conduct, and expression that arise in relationship to those processes' (Hallinan and Striphas 2014, p. 119). This, as Ted Striphas (2015, p. 396) argues, yields human thought to the 'logic of big data and large-scale computation', essentially altering 'how the category of culture has long been practiced, experienced and understood'. In addition to these ontological and epistemological questions concerning the human-machine interaction and history of information (Striphas 2015, see also Kittler 2006), scholars of algorithmic culture are concerned with a number of social, economic and ethical questions connected to digital production and consumption of culture.

These include questions related to the fact that the world's cultural heritage is increasingly owned and managed by private media conglomerates such as Google, Amazon and Netflix and that these companies sell their users' sensitive data to advertisers (Gillespie 2010, Kushner 2013, Hallinan and Striphas 2014, Roberge and Melançon 2015). In addition, by taking part 'in the business of information delivery', commercial online platforms and content providers are now, as Tarleton Gillespie points out, 'the primary keepers of the cultural discussion as it moves to the internet' (2010, p. 348).

In the digital publishing environment, online magazines provide original content and maintain their own platforms, simultaneously relying on the aforementioned digital intermediaries and 'internet giants' such as Google and Facebook as well as their Russian equivalents Yandex and VKontakte. At the same time, I maintain, online magazines are compelled to develop their cultural practices and discourses in alignment with the 'algorithmic culture' currently dominated by the leading new media companies. Against this backdrop, my article aims to answer the following research questions: How does the adaptation to the digital communication environment by publishers re-define the very concept of the popular lifestyle magazine and reorganise the institutional ties between media- and cultural industries? What is the lifestyle magazine's role as an institution of urban culture in the digital media era? I hypothesise that a significant part of the online magazines' work acquires meaning through the logic of 'transcoding' (Manovich 2002, p. 45-48) the contemporary techno-economic premises of information production into new cultural practices and discourses developed by online lifestyle magazines in response to their digital publishing environment. In what follows, I will discuss the case of Russian urban lifestyle magazines as an example of how a certain media genre participates in the institutional organisation of culture in contemporary Russia, at the same time

reflecting on the questions of digital media development that are currently gaining importance in Cultural Studies.

Data and method

My analysis is based on two case studies covering two contemporary Russian lifestyle publications that both concentrate on city culture but come from very different backgrounds: The first case study introduces *Afisha* ('Poster'), established in 1999 as a Moscow-based weekly glossy magazine listing and introducing all cultural events in the city. *Afisha* began its work as part of the so-called 'second wave' of Russian glossy magazines,[2] and it soon grew to be an important cultural agent and pioneer in the field of Russian glossy lifestyle magazines. Currently, *Afisha* belongs to one of the largest Russian media- and telecommunications conglomerates, Rambler&Co.[3] In 2015 the *Afisha* publishing house announced its new publishing strategy. It was to turn into a 'digital company', as Daniil Trabun, then Editor-in-Chief, stated in an interview: 'Ordinary gloss is death guaranteed' (planetaSMI 2015). By the end of 2015, *Afisha* shut down the print edition entirely and introduced a new internet edition, *Afisha Daily*.

My second case introduces *Inde*, a Kazan-based regional internet lifestyle magazine focusing on urban culture in the Republic of Tatarstan.[4] It was founded through the initiative of

[2] The second wave of international glossy magazines introduced luxury titles for elite readers. At this time, for example, Russian editions of *Vogue* and *Elle* were launched (see Bartlett 2006).

[3] Rambler&Co is owned by the businessmen Aleksandr Mamut and Vladimir Potanin known as close allies of the Kremlin. Mamut acts as the General Director of the company.

[4] Tatarstan is an autonomous republic located by the Volga River, 800 kilometers east of Moscow. Tatarstan's population is three million. The capital of Tatarstan is Kazan with a population of slightly over one million people. 53 % of the population are ethnic Tatars and 40 % Russian. One third are Muslim, the majority of which are ethnic Tatars.

Natalia Fishman, assistant of the President of Tatarstan, Rustam Minnikhanov, in 2015.[5] *Inde* follows the concept of traditional lifestyle magazines, concentrating on cultural events and leisure industry in the Tatarstan region, with a strong emphasis on local small entrepreneurs. In the manner of traditional consumer magazines, *Inde* works in close cooperation with the business sector, although it does not publish any advertisements but is financed with Tatarstan's public funds. *Inde* openly follows the example of *Afisha* but, as a new media outlet, it was able to start its work directly on a digital platform. Since it was a born-digital media project, *Inde*'s producers did not need to think about format changes related to the digitization of reading culture, the problem that a number of longer-term magazine brands have been dealing with over the past decade. In other words, *Inde* can rely on the experience that the Russian magazine industry has accumulated during the booming years of glossy lifestyle media, while simultaneously learning from the experiences of media convergence and social media use in the field of digital publishing.

My research is based on several sets of data. Firstly, I analyse the contents of my case publications published on the websites https://daily.afisha.ru/ and inde.io. In addition, I have monitored *Afisha*'s and *Inde*'s profiles on Facebook and Vkontakte, where most of the interaction with readers takes place. Finally, I interviewed the Executive Director, Director of Communications and a former Editor of *Afisha* and the Editor in Chief of *Inde* (three hours of

[5] Fishman became an assistant of Russia's Minister of Culture when she was twenty-one years old. She was responsible for the reconstruction of Gorky Park in Moscow as well as for the reorganization of a number of Moscow's long-standing cultural institutions (museums, theaters, etc.). She was involved with the founding of the Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center in Moscow, which is regarded as one of the most successful new cultural initiatives in Russia. Not all of her projects have been as successful, and she thus appears as a controversial figure in Russian public life (Po 2015).

semi-structured interviews) and followed the social media discussions concerning the shutdown of *Afisha*'s print edition and the launch of *Inde*. During my fieldwork in Moscow and Kazan in June 2016, I participated in the event 'Open discussion with *Afisha Daily*', organized in Gorky Park (Moscow) on 16 June, and the Summer Book Festival, co-organized by *Inde* in Kazan on 18 and 19 June.

The producers of both *Afisha* and *Inde* emphasise the role of social media distribution. In addition to the biggest social media channels such as Facebook and Vkontakte (the most popular social media in Russia), they pay close attention to the development of new applications where new reader groups can be reached. For example, the messenger application Telegram is one of the new important online distribution channels, for it does not filter the newsfeed in the same manner as, for example, Facebook does, although it currently gathers a considerably smaller number of subscribers (less than a thousand). Thus, both *Afisha* and *Inde*, whose basic interest is to produce general reading material and to reach the mass audience, now rely on micro-distribution on several social media platforms, thereby creating multiple parallel online readerships that may react differently to the publications' content, depending on the technological features of each application.

Through the example of *Afisha*, my aim in this article is to show how a long-term print-format lifestyle magazine, well known by a large Russian audience, has gradually created a new identity as a digital publication and finally transformed into a 'digital project'. My analysis of *Afisha* thus concentrates on the ways in which *Afisha*'s publishers and editors discussed the final format change, and on the question of how *Afisha* rebuilds itself within the structures of online publishing. My second case study, of *Inde*, illustrates how the consumer magazine format as an established institution of reading takes part in local cultural markets in one of the Russian regions. In the case of *Inde*, my analysis focuses particularly on the question of how a new online

magazine brand sets foot in the field of local cultural production and how the ideas of cultural consumption and cultural literacy relate to the developing media genre of online magazines.

Methodologically, my article attaches to the central agenda of Cultural Studies by portraying Russian lifestyle magazines as a dynamic field of interaction in which cultural meanings are produced and negotiated. This means that lifestyle magazines do not adhere to the traditional distinction between 'high' and 'low' cultural institutions and cultural forms, although they participate in the discussions on these and many other distinctions both in their contents and through their publishing strategies. I see the cultural transcoding of the networked and automatised information transmission into the magazines' content as being a significant factor in the development of contemporary culture and media. I draw this idea from new media scholar Lev Manovich, who asserts that 'the structures of computerized media follow the established conventions of the computer's organization of data' and continues to argue that the 'computer's ontology, epistemology, and pragmatics influence the cultural layer of new media, its organization, its emerging genres, its contents' (2002, p. 45, 46). Further scholarship has provided similar arguments, yet with an emphasis on the particular forms of categorising and explaining of culture through computer-assisted interfaces and data analytics in a commercial setting (Roberge and Melançon 2015, Striphas 2015). In my discussion, I bring out questions concerning the magazine's identification as an online platform with certain technological, cultural and commercial connotations (see Gillespie 2010), and how the online magazine content responds to algorithm-assisted cultural decision making which has become widespread through the increasing cultural dominance of digital intermediaries (Hallinan and Striphas 2014).

I begin my discussion with a description of the historical development of consumer magazines and their cultural status in post-Soviet Russia. I then proceed to analyse the transition of *Afisha* from a print platform to digital. The following section examines how *Inde* uses the

digital platform to participate in Tatarstan's cultural market and to explain cultural decision making, before moving to a consideration of online magazines as participants in algorithmic culture. In the discussion I also draw conclusions and summarise the key findings of my research.

Historical and cultural status of consumer magazines

In the Western history of reading, magazines have been significant cultural and media institutions developing new genres of popular reading and new models for societal, cultural and economic understanding of print culture (Tebbel and Zuckerman 1991, Scanlon 1995). In the case of contemporary urban lifestyle magazines, the expectations of a stable magazine concept, on the one hand, and the requirement for the timeliness of a lifestyle publication, on the other, meet the challenges of cultural legitimation of commercial publication format, a question which has defined magazine publishing throughout its history. Popular periodical magazines have offered a flexible media format for a combination of different types of reading materials from serial fiction and image reportage to intellectually and socially engaging feature articles. On the other hand, the dominant role of advertisers and consumerist content diminishes their cultural status. Even the producers and editors whom I interviewed for this research tend to stress the consumerist and easy-reading character of their publications, although part of the contents oftentimes speak for a more complicated reality.

High-circulation magazines have been central to the development of popular reading culture especially by strengthening the interdependence between print production and consumer markets and thus conceptually attaching popular reading to the realm of everyday consumption (Ballaster *et al*. 1991, Tebbel and Zuckerman 1991). Including advertisements in print periodicals targeted at specified niche audiences became one of the revolutionary moments in the economic history of reading. It transformed the financial structure of periodical publishing by making

possible the continuous publication of low-priced mass circulation magazines, as John Tebbel and Mary Ellen Zuckerman explain: 'Publishers could sell their products for […] less than the cost of producing them […]. With subscription lists in hand, these entrepreneurs provided the means for manufacturers to reach large numbers of customers' (1991, p. 140). Already by the early 20th century, the proportion of advertisements in leading magazines in the United States had reached fifty percent of the overall content (ibid., p. 141). The early consumer magazines thus formed a historically unique media format for the combination of consumer information with other types of stories and images, a format which later was successfully adopted by other media, for example, radio, television, and the internet.

This new economic structure of the periodicals market encouraged publishers to choose 'texts and genres that would appeal to the greatest possible number of readers, among them the least affluent readers' (Chartier 1999, p. 272). Historically, women, youth, and the working class were seen as groups that would most likely be involved in popular reading since they were considered the least affluent and least educated reader groups (Lyons 1999). The expansion of the commercial print market, however, 'led to the diffusion […] of texts that had already had a more limited circulation in other print form among readers of higher social levels and with more literate backgrounds and of texts put out simultaneously in different forms for different publics' (Chartier 1999, p. 272).[6]

[6] The question of popular reading of commercial print products both in the West and in Russia has been and continues to be a highly gendered issue (see Huyssen 1985, p. 189–190). This type of discourse on popular reading culture strengthened significantly in Russia in the 1990s when women (re)surfaced as writers of the most popular literary fiction as well as a new niche audience for Western-format women's magazines (see Goscilo 1999, 2000, Cherniak 2005). In my earlier research, I have analysed the Russian consumer magazine markets from the viewpoint of women's glossy magazines and feminised media practices (Ratilainen 2013, 2014).

Russia in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries largely followed the Central European and Anglo-American trends of consumer magazine markets until the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 (Brooks 1985, Kornilova 2008). The October Revolution radically changed the course of the history of mass communication in Russia. The majority of domestic consumer magazines that were published at the turn of the 20th century were closed because their 'bourgeois' worldview was not suitable for the new regime (Dashkova 2001). The Bolshevik regime created its own media system, which not only supported Communist ideology but also relied heavily on the high literary canon. Nevertheless, consumer magazines, especially women's fashion magazines, imported from the West, remained a part of unofficial circulation until perestroika (Bartlett 2006). At least partly due to this conflicted history, the public debate over the cultural role of glossy consumer magazines in early post-Soviet Russia revolved around the question of reading and its relationship to changing cultural institutions: the consumer magazine was regarded as such a powerful symbol of change in the Russian system of mass communication that it clearly stood for a new, capitalist, and commercial reading culture. Instead of considering that consumer magazines could be a traditional institution of almost any market-bound media system, the post-Soviet academic discourse often treated commercial magazines as foreign intruders standing in opposition to the high literary values and serious reading that are deemed essential to Russian culture (see Dubin 1998, Golubovich 1998). Especially in the 1990s-early 2000s, it seemed that consumer culture had replaced high literary culture in Russia, and the boom of Western-format-based glossy magazines was merely one proof of this. For instance, the Russian sociologist of culture Boris Dubin observed in 2002 that even literary

criticism had moved from its traditional venue of thick literary journals to glossy consumer magazines and to the internet (Dubin 2002/2010, p. 54).[7]

Dubin's observation shows that digitization took root simultaneously with the marketization of culture, although it became a major trend only at the beginning of the 2000s. In a similar fashion, the relationship between digitalization of communication and the institutional changes in the Russian cultural field have not yet been analysed from the viewpoint of lifestyle magazines, although their significance as cultural actors has increased especially since the early 2000s.

From print to digital and beyond: Reformatting of *Afisha*

Over the past decade, there have been several efforts to combine the concept of 'quality reading' and glossy consumer magazine format in new types of high- and middlebrow publications especially targeted for a liberal-minded, urban, and educated readership with high purchasing power in Russia. Naturally, these publications utilise digital technologies while simultaneously developing new cultural and social meanings for magazine reading (Zvereva 2014). In other words, magazines-turned-into-multi-media-projects have appeared, and their producers openly

[7] This type of conceptual and ideological use of glossy magazines was also applied to early 2000s Russian literature and film. For example, in 2006 one of the most significant post-Soviet postmodern writers, Viktor Pelevin, published the novel *Empire 'V'*, in which the glossy consumer magazine functions as a signifier of the entire post-Soviet field of knowledge that was constructed according to the laws of global capitalism (Ratilainen 2016). In the following year, 2007, Director Andrey Konchalovski launched the popular film *Glyanets* ('Gloss'), which depicts the path of a Russian provincial girl through the glossy magazine industry to physical and moral destruction. A line by a character in this film, 'Intelligent people do not read glossy magazines, they publish them', remains a popular proverb referring to the marketising logic of a number of cultural practices in contemporary Russia (Trubina 2016).

discuss their role in the post-Soviet media field through such terms as ‘quality reading’ and ‘intelligent audience’.[8]

To give up the print format entirely is, however, not a painless decision for established lifestyle publishers, as the glossy paper has been such an important part of the magazine concept and the defining factor in the new, post-Soviet magazine reading culture. To give up the print edition can be painful for an established magazine publisher, even if they have had years of experience producing parallel online editions, and *Afisha* is a good example of this phenomenon. For example, the website www.afisha.ru, which lists information on cultural events in Moscow and some other Russian cities, and which the director of the Afisha Company regards as ‘the main product of the brand *Afisha*’, has existed since 2000. In 2013 *Afisha* made the first step towards the expansion of featured online content and established three separate thematic resources with the titles *Afisha-gorod* (‘*Afisha* city’), *Afisha-vozdukh* (‘*Afisha* air’) and *Afisha-volna* (‘*Afisha* wave’), which obviously paved the way for the final shutdown of the print magazine.

With regard to this development, former Editor-in-Chief of *Afisha* Yuri Saprykin points out in an interview with *Inde* that the shutdown was ‘an inevitable event’ (Valeeva 2016). In addition, the last Editor- in-Chief of *Afisha*’s printed edition, Danil Trabun, stated that, during the final years, the editorial team had published the magazine for ‘other than economic reasons’, of which perhaps the most important was *Afisha*’s strong cultural role among Russian lifestyle

[8] One example is *Snob* magazine, launched in 2008. *Snob*’s brand is based on the conception of the global Russian elite living in different world metropolises: Moscow, New York and London. Besides the luxurious monthly glossy magazine, *Snob* publishes a web news portal. In addition, *Snob* provides social networking tools for registered customers (Roesen 2011).

magazines. As the former editorial team member interviewed for this research describes, *Afisha* magazine represented an important generational experience for its producers and arguably for a number of its readers as well. Writing for *Afisha* meant that one had appropriated its specific linguistic code and values, which meant belonging to a group of trendsetters and opinion leaders for Russian urban youth. Furthermore, *Afisha* served as a counter-reaction to 'mass glossy magazines' in keeping up with the newest quality standards of the post-Soviet print industry but striving to create its own cultural identity.

In Moscow, in summer 2016, *Afisha* appears as a proactive agent that gathers people together for different events. For instance, on Tuesday evening, 14 June, *Afisha* organized an event called 'Open interview with *Afisha Daily*' with a group of festival organizers and other people responsible for recreational areas and activities in Moscow and elsewhere in Russia.[9] The event took place in the open-air Pioneer movie theatre located in Gorky Park, the major park in Moscow. Gorky Park was originally founded in 1928 as the flagship recreational area but fell into decay during the 1990s. It underwent a fundamental restructuring over the past five years or so and was turned into an urban oasis of hipster activities. Thus, on that early summer evening, *Afisha*'s event could not have fitted better with the venue. *Afisha Daily*'s Editor-in-Chief, Yekaterina Dement'yeva, and Chief-Redactor, Filipp Mironov, hosted the interview before a considerably large audience consisting mainly of young Muscovites in their twenties and thirties. Besides the off-line interactivity, the event was livestreamed online, and the stream later became part of the video archive on the internet channel Afisha-live, launched by Afisha's former

[9] Participants in the interview included Directors of the Moscow parks Gorky Park and VDNKh; organisers of the Lastochka and Afisha Picnic music festivals; an organizer of the Geek Picnic in St. Petersburg; and organisers of other events such as concerts and 'quests'.

Director Natalia Galkina and Creative Director Filipp Bakhtin in 2015, shortly prior to the final format change (*Direktor instituta* 2015). The purpose of the channel is, as the website reports, to transmit 'the most important cultural events in Moscow and all over the world' daily. These types of online resources create a feeling that *Afisha*'s audience is able to take part in cultural life beyond temporal and physical limitations, the only necessity being a suitable digital device and high-speed internet.

Furthermore, on 30 July Afisha organised the Afisha Picnic music festival, which a number of *Afisha*'s current and former editors see as concrete proof of how the magazine has changed city culture in Moscow for the better. Afisha Picnic has been organized since 2004 and, for instance, Saprykin explains the importance of the event as follows: 'It really seemed that it is a new matrix, a formula (*obrazets*) of how life should be organised in public spaces of Moscow, as well as a foundation for many other types of initiatives on sports, gastronomy and so on' (Valeeva 2016). Saprykin goes on to say that 'at the beginning, we just fantasised for ourselves an ideal park just for one day, and then real-life parks and pedestrian streets started to look more or less like that' (ibid.). It is true that, over the past decade, Moscow has lived through an intensive period of reconstruction of parks (in addition to Gorky Park) and central streets, and that consumer magazine brands function as event organizers in the new, reconstructed venues. For instance, at exactly the same time as *Afisha*'s open interview in Gorky Park, the Russian edition of the international *Yoga Journal* organized a free yoga class there as well. On top of that, just a few feet from the Pioneer movie theatre, there was a photo exhibition, 'A Journey Through' (*Doroga skvoz'*), about China provided by *National Geographic Russia*, as well as another exhibition by *Harper's Bazaar Russia* to celebrate its 20th anniversary.

This all shows that *Afisha*, as well as many other consumer- and lifestyle magazines in Russia, has for a long time meant a lot more than just a printed periodical to be read at one's

leisure. They produce cultural experiences for the newly organized Russian urban space, thereby anticipating a 'reader' who is active and interactive both on- and offline. Despite the seemingly flourishing event culture and new innovative online video resources created around Afisha's brand, the public response to the shutdown of the printed *Afisha* magazine shows that it came as a shock to the Russian publishing industry. For example, another former Editor-in-Chief, Ilya Krasil'shchik, published an article entitled 'Remember that Moment' in the independent online newspaper *Meduza*, which he currently publishes based in Riga, Lithuania. In the article, he describes the devoted manner in which the editors worked for each issue of *Afisha*. For him, the magazine represented a dynamic change conducted through cultural work and cultural ideas, as he describes:

> We didn't make all that just because. Not for the salary, or career. We had a higher idea that united us and did not let us sleep at night. We believed in something. Probably we believed that, with these couple of hundred pages, once every two weeks we can change something around us. We believed that by portraying on the cover someone who is not worth it yet, we are making him or her earn that. That by reviewing a book, a piece of music, a film, great culture will emerge. (Krasil'shchik 2015)

Dement'yeva, who worked on the editorial staff of the printed *Afisha* as well, commented on the news about the shutdown and, obviously, Krasil'shchik's 'obituary' the following day (3 December 2015) on her Facebook profile. Dement'yeva shares Krasil'shchik's idea about *Afisha* as a cultural pioneer and innovator through which, as she puts it, 'everyone experienced something for the first time'. At the same time, she points out that nostalgia for the 'good old *Afisha*' is related mostly to the generational experience described above. In the early 2000s, when print glossy magazines were one of the most economically prosperous media formats in Russia, *Afisha* was on the crest of the urban development movement, and that obviously gave the

editorial staff a feeling of power and achievement. A nostalgic take on the previous work of the magazine is thus partly a misrepresentation of publishers' work. Dement'yeva, for instance, notes that, during the last years of its existence, the readership of the printed *Afisha* was decreasing, whereas the parallel online services gathered a steady number of users. Due to this reality, *Afisha*'s editorial staff, according to Dement'yeva, were constantly debating over whether the 'real *Afisha*' is made of ink or pixels. Towards the end of her post, Dement'yeva directly addresses the 'crybabies' for the old *Afisha*: 'I'm angry at the crybabies because they weep for a magazine of their youth. You grew up already, and you didn't even read the magazine that Daniil [the last Editor of *Afisha* – S.R.] was making'.

On a more general level, the response to the printed *Afisha*'s shutdown reflects the crossroads at which most people working in the publishing industry have stood at some point: how to preserve the culture of literacy and the cultural ideals developed during the print era while the economic and technological realities stand for digital publishing. *Afisha*'s solution has been to invest in multisensory, immediate experiencing of cultural events by providing offline gatherings and online video streams, simultaneously developing new, internet-friendly formats for feature articles published in *Afisha Daily.* At the same time, *Afisha*'s content reflects the conceptual change of the 'ideal magazine reader' into an internet user. This follows the logic that, according to Yuri Saprykin, now concerns the entire creative field. Instead of critical analyses represented through book and music reviews, cultural knowledge has to be transmitted through 'immediately showing' (Valeeva 2016). In this way, the contemporary publishers' professional development requires technological and/or social media literacy. Not only immediate access to information but also immediate experiencing of culture on a digital platform becomes the defining factor of new online lifestyle journals.

Afisha's case shows that the digital publishing environment has significantly changed the role of magazines in Russia. The Director of *Afisha*, in particular, sees that internet publication poses a serious technological challenge for magazine publishers, as they have not fully adapted to the changed practices of media reception. As she puts it, 'we read quickly and forget quickly'. In this situation, the editors are searching for new ways to compress vast amounts of information into a quickly consumable form. My analysis of *Afisha* further suggests that the producers of lifestyle magazines, in particular, find the digital publishing environment challenging for a number of reasons. First, lifestyle media do not have the same information value as the news media. Second, they lack the kind of intellectual status that, for example, the high cultural institutions have. Third, they have lost their role as everyday necessities of urban cultural consumers. For example, in *Afisha*'s case, there is no need to 'archive' information on city cultural events even for a week in a magazine anymore because this information is updated on multiple internet pages in real time. Currently, a major task of online city-lifestyle magazines amounts to developing and explaining different services for cultural consumers in the digital environment.

Born-digital city magazine and cultural consumption

The Kazan-based *Inde* joined the group of new regional online lifestyle magazines in late 2015. It stands out by its visual design, in which various typographical elements, photographs and illustrations, as well as inbuilt online features, merge into one visual matrix giving the impression of a well-thought-out, born-digital new media brand. 'Inde' is a colloquial Tatar-language expression and a well-known hedge word used by both Russian- and Tatar-speaking people in Tatarstan. In English translation it means 'well' or 'indeed' (Russian, 'Uzh'). Besides the title, *Inde* produces content only in Russian, which raises a question of the magazine's identity in

relation to its locality. On the one hand, the title refers to Tatarstan as a place of ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity: the centuries-long coexistence of Slavic and Tatar cultures; Orthodox Christianity and Islam. On the other, the discrepancy between the magazine's title and content reveals a deep cultural divide: co-existence without interaction, as the Editor-in-Chief of *Inde* describes the counter side of Tatarstan's cultural diversity (see Suleymanova in this issue).

The first articles appeared on *Inde*'s website in September-October 2015, and the first update on its VKontakte profile in December 2015. However, 11 January 2016, can be regarded as the starting point of *Inde* as a new lifestyle concept and online magazine brand, because on that day it introduced itself as such in a short article greeting the readers, 'Happy New Media!' (*S novym media*!). In the article, *Inde* sets as its goal to 'create a new city culture and a new citizen who loves her city, feels responsible for it and understands that it is possible to change the world around' (*Ot redaktsii* 2015). This shows that *Inde* is created to strengthen the urban identity of the Tatarstan region. Moreover, the ideal reader of *Inde*, and thus the ideal city dweller of Tatarstan, is someone who by her very existence adds to the 'coolness' of the region, as the article proclaims:

> We want to say that it is very cool (*kruto*) to live in Tatarstan. We would like those who have left Tatarstan to return, and we want to attract prospective, talented, successful people, those who make the future of the region, to the Republic. We can choose whatever place we want, but we choose Kazan and Tatarstan (ibid.).

To date, *Inde* has found a stable readership and established itself as a cultural agent in Tatarstan. Over the short period of its existence, *Inde* has gained some Russian-wide recognition as well. Its website was shortlisted in the 2016 rating of the most successful websites on the Russian-language internet in the category of the best media site (*'Inde' voshel* 2016). Furthermore, *Afisha Daily*'s Editor-in-Chief, Ekaterina Dement'yeva, invited *Inde* to participate in a networking

workshop at the Moscow Urban Forum in July 2016. Dement'yeva's initiative aimed to help small regional media to gain visibility outside their localities, but it also implies that regional lifestyle media are now a real competitor with more established, long-term brands, such as *Afisha*.

Although *Inde* appears as a regional magazine, the majority of its content covers the Republic's capital and largest urban centre, Kazan.[10] Through the lifestyle magazine concept, *Inde* clearly aims to popularize the idea that well-informed consumption is an inherent ingredient of the dynamic citizen. Trendy, brand-oriented consumption and vibrant city culture are portrayed as two sides of the same coin, namely the positive development of the Tatarstan region. Since *Inde* was designed from the start for users of the mobile internet, it also re-conceptualises urban culture from the standpoint of interactive and horizontally floating online communication. However, the information streams and interactions conducted on its multiple online platforms meet under one brand. Consequently, *Inde* as an online magazine brand, based on a certain concept and aimed at a certain task, operates at the intersection of decentralising and centralising

[10] Kazan is one of the Russian 'cities of a million inhabitants' (*goroda millioniki*), big population centres outside Moscow and St. Petersburg, and it has a very specific cultural and historical identity. For example, Leo Tolstoy went to the renowned Kazan University, V.I. Lenin was based there and Maxim Gorki lived there briefly on his way to fame. In recent years, Kazan's identity and city brand have been characterised by Kazan's status as one of the sport capitals of Russia. In 2013 Kazan hosted the summer Universiade, the international multi-sport event for university athletes, which paved the way for the Sochi Winter Olympics in 2014 (Yatsyk 2015). Kazan is one of the FIFA World Cup 2018 host cities. In addition to these types of mega-events, Kazan has witnessed a boom of globalised, urban and pop-up cultural events aimed at the local audience, such as artisan food festivals, city marathons, park concerts, film screenings, open lectures and book fairs. Together with this new city culture, different branches of lifestyle business have strengthened significantly: new bars and restaurants, breweries, coffee roasteries, hostels and hair salons have actively sprung up over the past several years.

communicative paradigms deriving from two different publication strategies: the concept-based strategy of magazine publishing and an interactive strategy based on social media distribution through a number of separate content providers.

In the field of online media, the role of the lifestyle magazine can be defined as the distributor of consumers' attention between media platforms and city cultural events. The primary goal of the online magazine is to attract the readers' immediate attention to their publishing platforms. In practice, though, a lot of the magazine's content re-directs the reader further to other cultural fora. One significant method of conducting this process in the framework of the consumer magazine brand is to 'package' different cultural products, events and services to resemble lifestyle consumption. In this regard, the technological task of the magazine publisher is to provide an easily accessible environment for cultural consumption in such a way that the media user, for example, would acquire tickets to a certain event through the magazine's web page instead of buying them directly from the organizer. As the Editor of *Inde* explains, the magazine producers want 'people to spend as much time as possible on the [magazine's] website'. On the other hand, for the producers of *Inde*, cultural consumption also means that the citizens of Tatarstan would spend their free time in other types of public spaces than at shopping malls, which became popular venues for leisure in early 2000s Russian cities, in the wake of the post-Soviet 'consumer revolution' (Gurova 2015).

The question of the urban lifestyle magazine's intellectual role for its readers occupies an important place in the discussions on cultural consumption. For example, the Director of *Afisha* emphasises that one of the central goals of her publication is to maintain a certain level of literacy, that is, to use beautiful language and to support literary talent among the magazine editors. Beautifully formulated thoughts, however, need to be published with the speed required by the internet age, and thus both technological and literary expertise are needed in the

production process. At the same time, it is difficult to combine these two fields of expertise, as the digital platform in general works in favour of fast-consumption contents, which means that interactive and audiovisual (especially video) content is strategically more beneficial to online publishers (*i.e.*, they attract more clicks) than text-based feature articles. In addition, the editors exercise their intellectual role in the tension of lifestyle magazines' dual identity as a consumer item and an institution of reading and literacy. Currently, this tension seems to be caused by both the identification of lifestyle magazines as mass reading with emphasis on popular content, on the one hand, and the paradigm change felt in the field of written culture in general, on the other. As *Afisha*'s publisher explains the situation, 'readers do not expect long reviews of a movie or a book. They expect to be told in approximately 140 characters why it is important to read this or that book or see this or that movie, why in general is it important to know that it has appeared'.

A good example of reinforcing the readers' cultural decision-making in the framework of city events and lifestyle consumption is *Inde*'s coverage of the Summer Book Festival in 2016. The two-day event was organized in the local centre of contemporary culture, Smena, in Kazan, and was the fifth book festival organized there since the foundation of the centre in 2013.[11] In addition to the presence of a number of Russian book publishers in the main exhibition hall, the festival program consisted of two parallel lecture series, discussions with writers and a separate

[11] The centre for contemporary culture Smena is located near Kazan's historical centre and main railway station. Its venue is reconstructed in the premises of an early 20th-century hay barn. *Inde* works in close cooperation with Smena, and the Editor-in-Chief jokingly described her publication as Smena's mouthpiece. Smena belongs to the group of Russia's new cultural institutions (see Kuleva and Safonova *et al*. in this issue) whose operation model builds on a combination of different cultural and educational activities. Accordingly, Smena's venue houses several large exhibition halls, lecture rooms, a publishing house and a bookstore. Smena has become an important discussion forum for young Kazanians, regularly bringing guest speakers from other Russian cities as well as from abroad.

children's program. Across *Inde*'s distribution platforms the book festival extended into a multidimensional virtual event, making the local online lifestyle magazine an important participant in the area's literary culture. Before and during the event, *Inde* informed its readers of the approaching festival by adding new bits of information to its news feed in real time. For further reading, *Inde* produced extensive editorial materials published regularly for several weeks after the event. These materials consisted mainly of publishers' lists of recommended literature and interviews with lecturers. In this manner, the summer book festival developed into an important information thread reminding *Inde*'s readers about literary culture and book consumption as well as attaching the city lifestyle magazine more strongly to the sphere of literary education in particular and cultural literacy in general.

The tension concerning the lifestyle magazine's cultural role in the tradition of reading and literacy is produced in these materials by discursively creating a contrast between the entertaining and academic content. This becomes apparent through several nuances, which aim at re-packaging academic and literary content and themes as entertaining. For example, four days prior to the start of the summer book festival, *Inde* promotes the lecture program by posting on VKontakte that 'we promise to make not-boring (*neskuchnye*) interviews with lecturers'. In the same vein, a publisher's recommendation for a popular history book says, 'notwithstanding the serious narrative style, there is an entertaining element in the book'. Through its commenting and documenting of the book festival, *Inde* thus creates a presupposition that readers of lifestyle magazines find academic or high-cultural content boring and that entertaining components need to be added or underlined in otherwise serious discussions on books and literature. It is true that the publishers' lists of recommended literature and interviews with lecturers published in *Inde*

collect far fewer social media comments than some other types of contents.[12] However, the few reader's comments attached to *Inde*'s postings on the book festival highlight the quality and significance of these materials.

These materials support the magazine readers' cultural decision-making in two separate ways. Firstly, the lists of recommended literature are composed in such a way that they create a virtual purchasing situation: the literary lists are accompanied by photographs of bookstalls usually portraying the seller/publisher in the front and an occasional customer reading a book in the background. Next to this real-live material, *Inde*'s online platform provides direct links to online booksellers' sites so that each of the recommended books can be instantly bought. The interviews with cultural specialists in turn provide elaborate information on the process of cultural decision making not only by relying on different cultural producers but also by accumulating cultural literacy. For example, an interview with lecturer Lev Oborin, a well-known poet and critic, opens up the concept of cultural literacy as a multi-dimensional field of knowledge. It suggests that cultural literacy can be acquired through knowing the structure of a literary institution, which enables the cultural consumer to follow and evaluate the work of individual publishers, translators and editors.

Engaging with the literary field like this not only guarantees a high level of cultural literacy but also helps the cultural consumer make independent choices as opposed to obeying publishers' recommendations mainly produced for marketing purposes. Instead of publishers' sites or online bookstores, the interview re-directs *Inde*'s reader to different journals and

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[12] *Inde* closely follows different city development projects currently taking place in Tatarstan. This is at least partly because founder Natalia Fishman runs the reconstruction of parks and green areas as her main job at the President's office. These contents generate the most readers' comments on *Inde*'s social media profiles.

magazines known for their literary criticism. It is important to note here that Oborin's list of magazines ranges from popular titles such as *Afisha* to academic 'thick journals' (*tolstye zhurnaly*),[13] and he describes the value of these publications to the reader: 'magazines are resources where one can find reviews by critics who accurately follow the latest literary trends' (Chesnokova 2016). In a slightly different tone, another interview brings up the question of entertainment versus academic content, but from the viewpoint of the cultural elite. Cinema critic Anton Dolin sums up the situation by saying that criticism is a 'service for those who can think'. This in turn means that 'those who watch films purely for entertainment do not use this service', and in these cases 'bright advertisement' is enough to guide cultural consumers in their decision making (Zagrudnikov 2016).

The recommendation lists and interviews with cultural experts represent cultural consumption as the event of purchase, on the one hand, and the process of enlightened cultural decision making, on the other. The process of choice can be developed through self-education and accumulating one's cultural literacy. The publishers' recommendations and interviews produced as the result of the summer book festival help the readers understand the larger context in which the event took place and conceptualise culture as an institutionalised practice with different actors and players. For an attentive reader, these materials also explain the practical and conceptual differences between, for instance, such genres as literary reviews, rating lists, and advertisements steering the reception of culture in their own specific ways. The reader of these materials is, so to speak, able to build an understanding of cultural consumption on the meta-level. Depending on the media genre used for cultural education, an individual consumer can arrive at different cultural products and events as guided by advertisements, rating lists and

[13] On Russian thick literary journals, see Vichkitova 2016.

reviews. Furthermore, with the help of magazines and other types of self-education, the readers are able to change and manage the level of their cultural literacy.

Discussion: Online magazines and algorithmic culture

To analyse media whose existence predates the era of digital communication in the framework of algorithmic culture calls for reconceptualisation of the key components of information production, such as the distribution and audience of lifestyle consumer magazines. Due to the atomisation of institutions supporting centralised mass media and the emergence of new digital content providers, both the magazine's content and audience are scattered across a number of digital platforms, of which the magazine's own website is just one distribution channel among many others. Moreover, digitally networked consumers of media are nodes not only in their social networks but also in the cybernetic networks based on 'human-machine entanglement' (Hallinan and Striphas 2014, p. 131, Striphas 2015, p. 396), which characterises the current everyday media use in completely new ways. In this communication environment, the online magazine's function comes close to that of such service providers as 'infomediary' (Morris 2015), 'organizational intermediaries' (Andrejevic 2013) and 'platform' (Gillespie 2010), which in their original meaning are devoid of original content production but transmit, organise and evaluate digital media content for consumers. The last term in the list has attained a generalised and almost neutral meaning when referring to almost any type of internet resource that enables sharing and managing content but that in fact discursively hides a great deal of technological manipulation, economic competition and political bias involved in digital culture, as Gillespie (2010) has demonstrated.

To describe online magazines as participants in algorithmic culture, the best term, in my view, is *aggregates of digital resources.* This enables us to engage both the technological and

economic resources as well as resources supporting cultural literacy in the work of the online magazine. The case of the online city-culture magazine analysed closely in this article further shows that, in their role as cultural arbiters, online magazines take an active part in the discursive adaptation of the algorithmic logic of categorising and evaluating cultural products based on computational processes in areas that are not directly related to digital media. This, for example, applies to the ways in which magazines treat cultural professionals as they convert their work to the logic of recommendation engines and other services for managing and optimising large amounts of cultural information for individual use. This becomes comprehensible in the broader context of digital media, in which cultural consumers are used to receiving cultural content (especially movies and music) through on-demand resources with inbuilt recommendation engines, which automatically compile personalized lists of items for future consumption. These lists correspond more accurately to the users' personal cultural taste with the increase of human-computer interaction invested in cultural consumption. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that through their practice of cultural and discursive transcoding of the logic of recommendation engines into expert interviews, online magazines simultaneously explain the algorithm-assisted cultural evaluation in relation to other/alternative systems of cultural curation, such as advertisement and literary criticism.

In the contemporary Russian reading culture characterized by the rapid commercialisation of the publishing sphere in the 1990s and the virtually simultaneous development of Russia as an internet society, the quality markers of any cultural product become closely connected to its technological and new-media potential. Therefore, an online magazine acquires significance as a cultural institution where different types of technological and symbolic appropriations meet. As my analysis of online city-culture magazines has shown, the platform through which cultural

content is consumed always suggests a certain mode of reception that not only requires certain technological and economic support but also comes with cultural and historical baggage.

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